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CIA caught opening mail

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A U.S. appeals court has upheld a ruling awarding \$1000 in damages to each of three persons whose mail was opened by the CIA.

The U.S. Second Court of Appeals ruled Nov. 10 that the CIA had no legal sanction to open mail to and from the Soviet Union belonging to Amherst professor Norman Birnbaum, to Mary Rule MacMillen and to advertising executive B. Leonard Avery.

Judges held that the \$1000 "represents the upper limit allowable" in such cases. In a similar ruling early this year, the same court awarded Corliss Lamont, chairman of the National Emergency Civil Liberties Union, \$1000 after the CIA illegally opened a letter to him mailed from Moscow.

Evidence in the trial showed that more than 215,000 pieces of mail sent to or received from overseas were secretly opened by the CIA during a 20-year program, allegedly ending in 1973.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), which handled the mail case, said it would ask the government to compensate the many thousands of other people whose mail was opened by the CIA. Hundreds of them, the ACLU noted, have already filed damage suits. A.W.